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SANTA'S HELPER

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

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December 17, 1999

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COMMONWEAL



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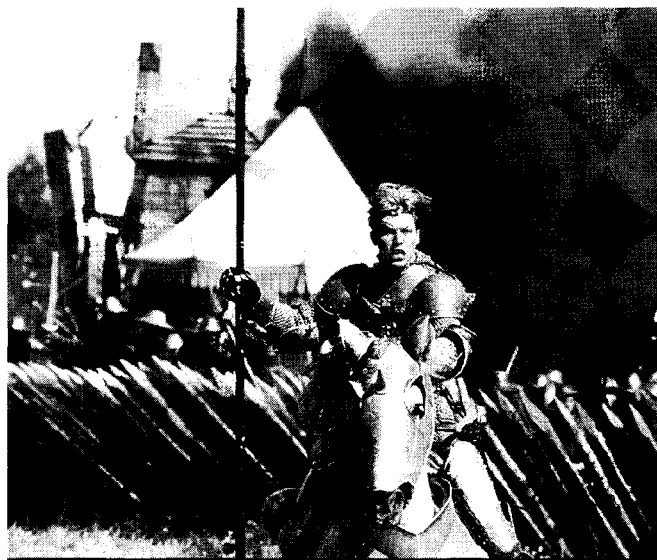


"You knew I was destructive when you married me!"

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To the Editors
Stop worrying

Commonweal's worried commentary ["Mandate from Rome," December 3] on the *Ex corde ecclesiae* implementation document, passed by the United States bishops at November's annual assembly, contained hopeful statements such as: "In most places, good people will try to make this work." And, again, "The bishops may be able, in their own dioceses, to bring about a careful and resourceful implementation."

Many bishops, from the assembly floor and at hotel lunch tables, reported that most representatives of Catholic colleges and universities in diocesan dialogues stated that, while the document is not the kind they themselves would write, they could work with it in a positive way.

Norms are incompatible with trust and dialogue, *Commonweal* seems to believe. Bishops think otherwise. Catholic colleges and universities are related to norms from accrediting associations, professional organizations, athletic associations. When the norms of those groups are not adhered to, as occasionally happens, the college or university works to arrive at an accommodation which successfully addresses the problem. Fear of a heavy-handed individual bishop should not overshadow the evenhandedness and deep appreciation bishops overwhelmingly have for Catholic colleges and universities as treasures both to the church and to American higher education.

"Ambiguity" in the bishops' document concerns *Commonweal*. Aware of the diversity within Catholic higher education and its different legal environments, the bishops voted for "flexibility" in the norms. One person's flexibility, it seems, is another's ambiguity. How flexibility can be present without some ambiguity, I'm not sure.

Difficulties and tensions will at times

be part of implementing *Ex corde ecclesiae*—as exceptions rather than the rule. Trust and dialogue and cooperation, called for from both the bishops and the Catholic higher education community, can bring promise to the implementation of *Ex corde ecclesiae* in the years ahead.

(MOST REV.) JOHN J. LEIBRECHT

Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Mo.

The writer is chair of the Ex corde ecclesiae Implementation Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Liberalism, then and now

Congratulations to the editor and the entire staff for carrying on the great tradition begun seventy-five years ago. As one who has read *Commonweal* for more than forty-five years, I am certain that thousands of readers like myself have benefited greatly from the intelligent writing and stimulation found in every issue.

The recent [November 19] anniversary issue lived up to expectations because of your choice of representative commentators. I think the following from a nineteenth-century priest of the Archdiocese of New York is a significant contribution to the meaning of authentic liberal Catholicism and to continuing discussion of its implications. It is part of a reply that Father Richard Burtzell wrote to the Holy Office, in response to charges that he and friends were part of a clerical clique seeking to Americanize the church in this country:

"I am a liberal with both God and man. The name liberal does not frighten me. By God's grace I shall always be liberal in regard to others and in regard to God inasmuch as I shall recognize in others their worth, even if they have not the gift of faith. I shall ever seek to make known to them the reasonableness of our church, being aware that only reasonable homage is acceptable to God. I am a liberal inasmuch as I love liberty. I love very earnestly political liberty which insists that society shall protect the poor and the weak. I love freedom of discussion with regard to the arrangement of our social concerns, guaranteed to us by our American insti-

tutions. I love also, in the sphere of the church, the full freedom of discussion in all things wherein God allows us liberty because this seems to me most fitted to promote the good of souls and the extension of the church in the United States."

The author and several other priests, including my predecessor in this parish, Father Thomas Farrell (1857–80), who was their mentor, were part of a group known as the *Accademia* that met regularly in the rectory of this parish. They were criticized and some were silenced by ecclesiastical authorities but much of their agenda is in the approved documents of Vatican II. (REV.) ALDO J. TOS

New York, N.Y.

The writer is pastor of Saint Joseph's Church in Greenwich Village.

A record?

Congratulations and good wishes on the occasion of the magazine's seventy-fifth anniversary.

I suspect that I hold a record among *Commonweal* readers. I first read it in October of 1929—seventy years ago. I was a freshman at Princeton and all Catholics in the freshman class were given subscriptions to *Commonweal* courtesy of a Byrnes Macdonald, who, I think, had a son in the class. In any event, I have been a *Commonweal* reader since that time (at least on and off), as well as a sustaining contributor.

EDMUND T. DELANEY

Chester, Conn.

From the editors: Our thanks to Mr. Delaney. Our recommendation to other readers: Go now and do what Mr. Macdonald did.

Right rites: a Methodist view

Re: "Outside the Church: Whom Catholics Marry and Where" [September 10] by James D. Davidson: One does not know whether to laugh or cry at the good professor's archaic notion of "the church" and his ignorance of the real world (a posture or a conviction?).

Post-Vatican II there are other churches besides the Roman Catholic one

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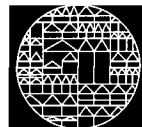
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C O M M O N W E A L



Forgive us our trespasses

Getting our *mea culpas* right will be no easy matter. As the millennium turns, plans for a Jubilee year and proposals for debt forgiveness remind us that the times call for a spirit of repentance and reconciliation. As the year 2000 proceeds, we're sure to encounter both heartfelt atonement and self-serving defenses. There is nothing like a trend to ruin a good idea, but there is also nothing like a good example to show the way.

Here are two recent, perhaps incomplete, but nonetheless genuine expressions of repentance. The first is an admission of responsibility by the UN for the massacre of thousands of Muslim men and boys in 1995 in Srebrenica during the war in Bosnia. The massacre was carried out by Serbs in a "safe area" designated by the UN and guarded by Dutch troops serving in the UN peacekeeping force. It is, and was, no secret that the peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, in a misguided policy of maintaining neutrality, treated the Bosnians and the Serbs as equals, and stood by while the Serbs killed Bosnian Muslims. The constant shelling of Sarajevo made the headlines and provided the pictures, but whole areas of eastern Bosnia were subject to even worse treatment. When the UN peacekeeping forces finally began to establish so-called safe areas, a sense of relief was felt by the beleaguered citizens of those towns and cities. But even after that, the UN's senseless policy of neutrality allowed it to negotiate unrealistically with the Serbs bent on slaughter, and it kept UN officials from authorizing a more aggressive response by its troops and from calling for air strikes when they were needed. In Srebrenica, the Dutch troops literally stood by while the Serbs overran the town and deported its citizens to their horrible fate.

The UN, in a report released on November 15, accepts responsibility for a misguided policy of neutrality, for failing to defend those under its protection, and for refusing the Bosnians the means to defend themselves. The report has a particular strength in that the man making it, Secretary General Kofi Annan, was also the man in charge of the peacekeeping force. That the UN, which so often seems overwhelmed by the strictures of diplomatic rules, should admit so openly and so soon how tragically misguided were its policies is new and it is remarkable. It does not promise, of course, that the UN will do better next time. That will be the real test of the UN's resolve to avoid the sins of Bosnia.

The second example is remarkable not for its novelty but for its manner and content. On Sunday, November 7, to mark the beginning of the Jubilee year, there was a special worship service in Milwaukee gathering Jews and Catholics. Archbishop Rembert Weakland began by acknowledging "before my fellow Jewish citizens of this city of Milwaukee the wrongs we Catholics have done." Among those wrongs to which the archbishop testified was: "We Catholics, by preaching a doctrine that the Jewish people were unfaithful, hypocritical, and God-killers, reduced the human dignity of our Jewish brothers and sisters, and created attitudes that make reprisals against them seem like acts of conformity to God's will. By doing so, I confess that we Catholics contributed to the attitudes that made the Holocaust possible."

The archbishop cited five transgressions for which he asked forgiveness "personally and in the name of the Roman Catholic community I represent." Among these were: "...all the statements that implied that the Jewish people were no longer loved

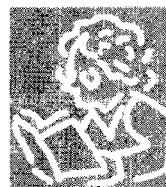
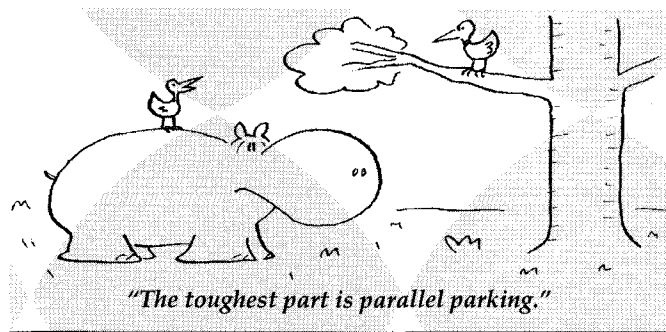
by God, that God had abandoned them, that they were guilty of deicide, that they were being, as a people, punished by God," and, "all the teaching and preaching in Catholic churches that may have led up to the Holocaust and that may have contributed to the horrors of that attempt at genocide."

Finally, the archbishop acknowledged the need for a firm purpose of amendment. This included the affirmation "that the God we Catholics worship and that we worship together with the Jewish community will not be divided by our human hatreds, that our God cannot be the source of hatred and harm to others," and "that the God we worship together cannot go back on his word. A covenant made by God will not be a covenant rejected by God...."

There have been, over the last three decades, words and gestures of repentance to the Jewish community from popes, beginning with John XXIII, from Vatican congregations, and from cardinals and bishops. (Most recently, Cardinal John O'Connor, in a Yom Kippur letter, asked the forgiveness of New York's Jewish community, and the bishops of France and Germany have written letters acknowledging the direct responsibility of their own churches for the Holocaust.) Some of these statements have helped to heal and some have raised further questions about the church's willingness to come to terms with its responsibility—full and communal responsibility.

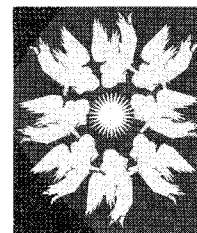
Perhaps Archbishop Weakland's words have carried us a step further. He does not speak beyond his own jurisdiction, but he does speak for the whole Catholic church of Milwaukee as well as himself. He acknowledges a communal sense of responsibility. The litany-like intonation of his "confession" sets this statement within the context of prayer. The richness of this litany was further deepened by the archbishop's request that the Catholics in the congregation intone "Amen" after each of his acknowledgments, "if they feel in conscience they can do so." For even when we get the words right and make the appropriate gestures, we must still share a heartfelt remorse for the sins of the Catholic church, and the sins of those institutions, governments, and bureaucracies that act, or have acted, in our names.

These two very different examples of repentance remind us how difficult it is to say the words and make the gestures that will genuinely express our remorse. Yet at this time of the year, we are also reminded of how hope is renewed and long-deferred promises fulfilled in surprising ways. Each Christmas we begin again the work of the generations that have preceded us.



**THE NEXT ISSUE OF
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**HAVE A
BLESSED CHRISTMAS
AND A
HAPPY NEW YEAR**



From the archives



Throughout 1999, *Commonweal* has been celebrating its 75th anniversary. Here from the magazine's May 3, 1963 issue is an excerpt from "Peace on Earth" by John Cogley.

Pope John's *Pacem in terris* must be counted among the greatest of modern encyclicals.

It may also be one of the historic documents of our time, destined to shape the world to come. I cannot recall any encyclical's being received with such widespread approval, and even excitement. It was taken as a kind of breakthrough to a new way of thinking about world order. Its basic principles, of course, are not new at all, but its effect will be revolutionary if, as the pope prays, it releases new energy, by refreshing faith in the possibility of peace, stimulating hope in the future of mankind, and eliciting the charity found among peoples the world over who want to live without the threat of war hanging over them but do not quite know how.

Just a month ago I said in these pages that the question haunting our generation is, Who speaks for Man? *Pacem in terris* came as a kind of dramatic reply. In it, the pope stated specifically that he spoke not only as the head of the church but as one who voiced the longing of all humanity. He addressed himself, consequently, not only to the Catholic world but to people of all faiths and of none, a precedent-breaking attempt to rally all men of good will to the cause of peace.

JOHN COGLEY

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

ONE LAST WORD

Mrs. McCarthy takes her leave



This is my last column for *Commonweal*. I will miss the periodic sense of communication with like-minded people and, conversely, the occasional dispute with those who are not. The purpose of a column, says Roger Rosenblatt in a valedictory of his own, is to provide a place for ruminations on a subject. In his case, because he was writing for *Modern Maturity*, he was confined to "the various new directions of body and spirit that a person takes after fifty."

My charge was less specific. When James O'Gara, then editor of *Commonweal*, wrote to me in 1974—twenty-five years ago—about my agreement to write a *Commonweal* column, he gave me a wide latitude in the choice of subjects. "Part of the value of a columnist," he

wrote, "is that he or she dreams up new ideas not dreamed up by me. And with your background and interests, I'm sure you won't have any problem once you get started."

He did, however, have a few suggestions. "To begin with, though, there is the whole feminist business, inside and outside the church. We would welcome comments from a woman's viewpoint, something we haven't had too much of. Then, too, there is the Washington scene." The fact that at the time *Commonweal* had a regular political columnist did not mean, he said, that I was barred from political comment if I wanted to make it.

My columns in the year following 1975 show me finding my way. They did include two that could be described

as being written from a woman's viewpoint, and others that could be called political commentary. The first two were "Dear Sister Kate" and "Our Fiction and the Family." "Dear Sister Kate" was a plea that a feminist in her concern for the drastically oppressed should not overlook the less dramatic forms of injustice and work to right them as well. "Our Fictions and the Family" took issue with some then current dire predictions on what effect the woman's movement would have on the family.

"One of the most common myths about family," I wrote, "is that the historical norm has been the mother who stayed at home, kept house, and took care of the children until they all left home. This situation has been true only of middle-class women for a comparatively short time in history. Most women have always worked—and had only spare time left for cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing. True, a woman might work in the fields beside her husband like today's migratory worker—but she might also be the primary agricultural worker as in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Immigrant women cooked

A word of thanks

With this issue, Abigail McCarthy concludes her twenty-five years as a *Commonweal* columnist. It has been a wonderful run, and Mrs. McCarthy has contributed immeasurably to the identity and integrity of this magazine. We are greatly in her debt and will miss her steady, always intelligent interest in public affairs as well as her poignant reflections on little noticed aspects of everyday life. Her recent column, "Summers Past" (July 16), was a typically eloquent evocation of a childhood touched by the rhythms of, and the abiding lessons taught by, a life lived on a family farm. As always, the column's elegiac tone avoided any futile nostalgia while insisting that we remember what has been lost.



Mrs. McCarthy flourished under three different editors—no easy task!—beginning with James O'Gara in 1974 and continuing unflaggingly through the "Steinfelses" era. O'Gara asked McCarthy to pay special attention to issues and events that might be important to women, and that concern has been evident in much of what she has written, as has her respect and admiration for the work of women's religious orders. In her first column, she described a narrow escape from a tornado, a near-calamity that raised profound questions about how best to use the time allotted to us, even prompting her to question her own devotion to women's issues. She concluded that the "ongoing work is worth the time." It certainly has been.

THE EDITORS

and did the laundry in other people's houses, and were often allowed one day to go home to their own children, for a few hours. They worked in the textile mills ten and twelve hours a day in New England, and in the sewing lofts of lower New York—and no one cared about them until they formed their own unions."

In "Our Search for Roots," I puzzled over the new ethnicity—a popular movement at the time which has now almost disappeared. "As a development it followed so close on the heels of the black-power movement as to be certainly both reaction and imitation. It is at once a remedy for alienation and the politicization of the powerless." "But," as I quoted Father Andrew Greeley, "for most white Americans today outside of certain urban enclaves ethnic identification is a matter of choice...ethnicity is an option, not an obligation." And I pointed out, "for ethnicity has a way of suddenly melting away. Because, for example, as my great-grandparents and grandparents were immigrants of Irish origin over a century ago, I have always thought of myself as Irish-American, as did my parents, and proudly so. But my children are part German; I have blood cousins of Swedish, French (and probably of American Indian), English, Polish, and Italian background; my children have cousins of Egyptian and Russian Jewish ancestry. I cannot be anything but moderate or marginal in my ethnicity without denying or denigrating people with whom I share a physical heritage. This must be true of millions of Americans."

I have chosen these examples because I think they may be illustrative of what Rodger Van Allen wrote of my column (*Being Catholic: Commonweal from the Seventies to the Nineties* [Loyola University Press, 1993]) and what I hope is true: "If there was an overarching theme, it seemed to be a quest for human and religious authenticity." He also noted that my interests were broad (something I also hope is true) and "included literary as well as social and political commentary."

Some of the literary columns were just sheer fun to write, like "The Moon was Shining Sulkily," included in those

1975 columns. I had browsed through old "readers," the anthology-like texts left from my father's teaching days, and found one delight after another. One of the old *Child Life* readers, for example, fed a need newer texts seldom do—the need for escape into nonsense and fantasy. The editors, for example, found room for Tweedledee's recitation for Alice,

"The moon was shining sulkily,
Because she thought the sun

Had got no business to be there
After the day was done—"

Thus, almost anything and everything is grist for the columnist's mill. The effort to share an experience or insight with readers and to illuminate it for them is a habit of mind and one I think I will not lose. It has been a pleasure to do that with *Commonweal* for these twenty-five years. In farewell, I again quote Roger Rosenblatt: "Thanks for reading." □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

OH, BEHAVE!

Stifle your road rage



Recently I read in the news that two thirty-something, middle-class Alabama "ladies" had a murderous road-rage confrontation. The incident took place on a suburban Birmingham highway and ended with one young woman shooting the antagonist who was approaching her car.

When Southern women abandon the good manners and stoic control expected of steel magnolias, the country is in trouble. Who hasn't noticed the increasing number of young female drivers joining the crowds hurtling in and out of traffic, cutting off other motorists at top speed? Obviously, the "emotional intelligence" quotient of the population is sinking fast. "Emotional intelligence" is a new catchword in psychology that refers to the ability to attend to inner emotions, successfully regulate them, and appropriately respond to the emotions of others.

In other words, "emotional intelligence" is a code word for good moral character. Persons can develop emotional competence only by enacting freely willed choices of moral self-restraint. Because we have free will, we are morally responsible for our emotional behavior as well as for our words and deeds. Regulating emotional displays is a universal obligatory task for everyone who grows

up as a civilized being. Granted, it is harder for those individuals who inherit difficult temperaments to overcome them. It is hard to be born shy or irritably quick on the trigger. But everyone, even the "easy to rear," happy, extroverted child, has to learn emotional self-control. Only a toddler can be morally excused for "emotional hijackings." A baby can't help having her conscious self-control flooded by emotional storms; but grown-ups without brain damage or mental illness can help themselves.

The old idea that people are puppets, controlled by deep unconscious forces or past conditioning, is receding. *The Handbook of Mental Control* (Prentice Hall, 1993) has twenty-six research articles devoted to self-control of emotions, mood, memory, thoughts, and behavior. Unimpaired, adult human beings can imagine alternatives to events, and thereby are free to choose between different responses.

Even though emotions often arise from nonconscious stimuli, they can be regulated. Some change, perceived in the internal or outer environment, stimulates an emotional response, but the process is so rapid that many emotions appear to come out of the blue. Like our sense perceptions, emotions are automatic, embodied responses that give us information about the inner and outer

environment, especially the interpersonal environment. They give us tacit information and prepare us for action. Certain instantaneous fears, of snakes or large animals, may be built in by evolution to help us survive predators. Other secondary or learned social emotions are more complex and involve cognitive meanings.

Still, even the most primitive emotions can be regulated. The experience of soldiers advancing into battle demonstrates the control of fear. They don't run away because they feel attachment to their units and want to avoid the shame and guilt of cowardice. Group support and group social pressure help humans control their emotions. Road rage may be prevalent because a driver is isolated within the automobile and cannot see or hear other drivers face-to-face. Pedestrians usually don't act so aggressively, and behave themselves in crowds—at least in a crowd that has not degenerated into a mob.

A person driving a vehicle must concentrate on controlling and responding to it. People studying road rage hypothesize that drivers symbolically fuse their identity with their vehicle. Driving to a destination is part of a personally planned goal. Thus, an interruption or frustration in traffic becomes a disruption and a personal affront. Because the driver is isolated, there is no cloud of witnesses to restrain the operator's emotional expression. Hence the frequency of loud exclamations, curses, and obscene gestures. But the need to escape from isolating passivity may also explain why angry drivers so often stop their cars, jump out, and confront others. Not long ago there was a report of a young man who pulled an older man from his car and beat him up, because he was driving too slowly.

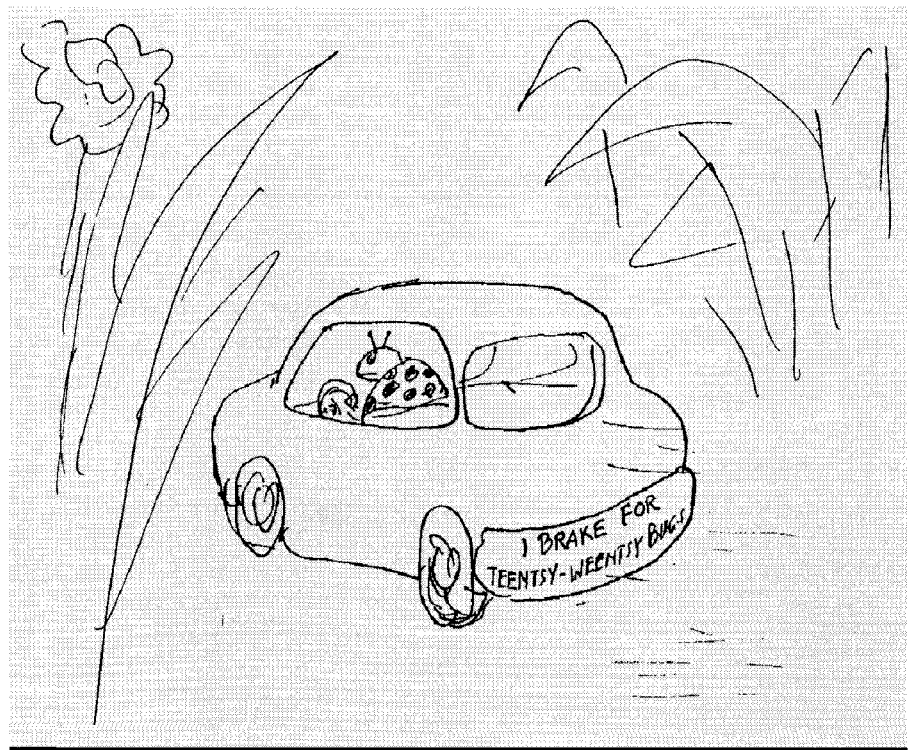
Should this young man's lawyer mount a road-rage defense? Nonsense. Crimes of passion have too long been tolerated because of the romantic myth that emotions cannot be controlled. Such beliefs have allowed persons to indulge in, and excuse, wild, immoral behavior. Human beings can control their emotions. The instantaneous involuntary facial, postural, gestural, and vocal re-

sponses that constitute emotional responses can be suppressed by acts of will. I do not bare my teeth, howl, and attack an offending dinner partner; indeed, we are all quite skilled in employing social deception. Better still, if one refuses to act on an emotional impulse, exaggerate its expression, and invest energy in sustaining the emotion, the conscious feeling will eventually dissipate. Acute emotions arise and fade following certain distinct patterns. Every episode of tears eventually comes to an end.

In my common-sense upbringing, we were not allowed to "pout," "sulk," "wallow in misery," or "cry in our beer." When feeling low we were instructed to stand up straight, smile cheerfully, and get on with it. "It" was preferably some task we had been procrastinating. Of course, modern sophisticates can work out, do their yoga breathing, meditate, take power naps, eat power bars, or, in desperation, pop a pill. Ancient strategies of self-control are revived in self-help literature. Those things we do not mentally focus on, or invest with attention, lose their power to overwhelm and control consciousness. "Letting go" and "not sweating the small stuff" bring calm. What you decide to attend to de-

termines your state of mind and your actions. With repeated voluntary acts certain responses become habitual. Great saints have made millions of micro decisions that then result in their spontaneous acts of love. Violent offenders in road-rage incidents have repeatedly excused their angry outbursts.

Since we can carry on conversations with others, we can talk to ourselves and employ another strategy for emotional self-control. Self-commands such as "stop this stupid, childish reaction this minute," can produce results. Of course we don't want to completely deny the emotions we feel because we need to be in touch with our emotions to receive the tacit information that they bring. Self-care and self-regulation depend on accurate readings of vital signs. But sometimes, indeed much too often, the information received from an emotional response confirms the existence of personal reservoirs of selfishness and pride. A grandiose sense of entitlement continually springs up and has to be cut down. We may have to employ the full range of emotional control strategies: Re-imagine the great narratives, remember past commitments, and call to mind love's gift. In a word, grow up. Banish that inner child, especially from the driver's seat. □



Maurice Timothy Reidy

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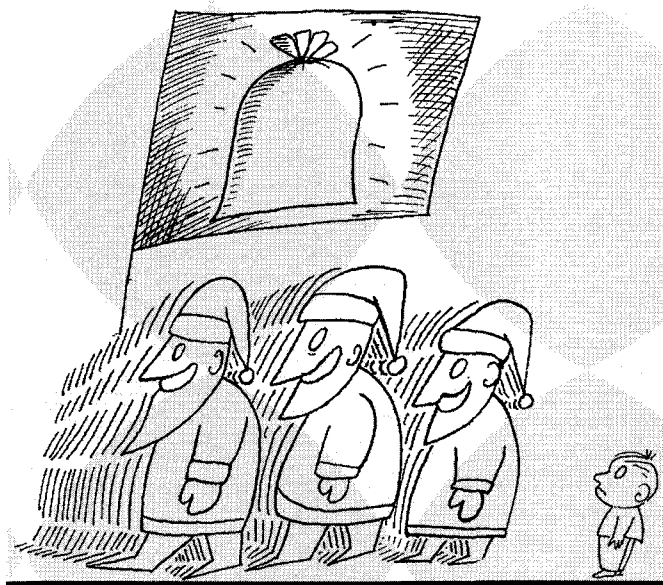
Initiated into the conspiracy

We took Santa Claus very seriously in my house, and in many ways I still do. This is an odd confession, I admit, coming from a twenty-four-year-old born and raised in New York City. Writers are told to avoid clichés like the plague (there I go again...) and I realize there is no more hackneyed a literary persona than poor Old Saint Nick. But I hope you will indulge me in a peculiar coming-of-age story.

As a young boy, I had an image of Santa Claus pieced together from children's stories, seasonal television shows, and holiday trips to Macy's. At first, the variety of these Santas did not bother me. But as I grew older, I became puzzled by Santa's many manifestations. Why would he whittle away his time at a mall when he clearly ought to be up north getting things done? Why did that short, balding fellow in *Miracle on 34th Street* look nothing like that obnoxious Santa in *A Christmas Story*? For some reason, discrepancies between school Christmas pageants at Saint Gabriel School and the gospels didn't bother me as much.

Despite my curious nature, I remained a firm believer in Santa. I began concocting an elaborate schema to accommodate his multiple personalities. Mall Santas, I concluded, were merely ambassadors carrying out orders, Santa-inspired movies the work of some northern PR machine looking to saturate the market, etc.

So when my friend David Fogler gave me the bad news about Saint Nick in sixth grade—his voice echoing off the tile bathroom floors like some schoolyard Grinch—I did not believe him. (Of course, I didn't tell him as much.) But the



news shook my faith, and I began looking for the cracks in my system. What if all mail for Santa was just tossed into a backroom at the post office? What if mall Santas were really just, well, mall Santas? My suspicions were finally confirmed that Christmas when I received two presents with the same wrapping paper: one read, "From Grandmother," the other "From Santa."

My parents officially broke the news to me a year later, but not in the manner that I had expected. It was Christmas Eve and my father asked me to stay downstairs while my seven younger siblings went to bed. He cornered me by the Christmas tree, and as he bore down upon me, I smiled slightly, thinking I was one step ahead of him. "Tim, could you help your mother put the presents out tonight?" he asked.

"Sure," I said, waiting for the official announcement of Santa's untimely demise.

But that was it. He turned away and headed toward the kitchen.

Puzzled by my father's elusiveness, I followed my mother into the garage, where—to my amazement—she uncovered dozens of wrapped presents from behind our Chevy station wagon. She handed them to me casually, asking me to bring them to the living room. Then we went to the basement, where she produced twice as many gifts, hidden beneath boxes of old sweaters. If my mother approached her job rather methodically (judging by her demeanor, we could have been taking out the garbage), then I carried out her orders in a state of awe—amazed not so much by the number of presents as by the fact that she had successfully hidden them from so many prying eyes.

As the reality about Santa became clear, I was simultaneously initiated into the vast conspiracy that keeps the truth hidden from the young. I began to realize that my Santa schema, while ultimately flawed, did have its merits. I was pleased by the existence of such conspiracy and my involvement in it. I was helping to perpetrate a fraud on my siblings, and, in spite of the urgings of the season, I was delighted.

These days, I am quite a scrupulous Santa Claus. When my youngest brothers go to bed on Christmas Eve, my mother and I go foraging through the house, retrieving presents. I routinely make sure that Santa's wrapping paper differs from Mom's wrapping paper. (I will not tolerate mistakes like those that shook my faith.) I also always make sure to eat half of the cookies and drink some of the milk left on the dining room table and, when no one is looking, I toss half-eaten carrots in the driveway, and slyly point to them on the way to church on Christmas morning. I suppose I am like that man I heard about somewhere who shovels deer-dung onto his roof every Christmas Eve.

Some may think that such childish pranks are beyond an educated man such as myself. But I find solace in such trickery. The way things are going, it doesn't seem I'll be involved in any sexy, international intrigue anytime soon. The Santa Conspiracy will have to do. □

Maurice Timothy Reidy is an editorial assistant at Commonweal.

CHRIST THE KING?

The unexpected power of a symbol

Thomas M. Landy

In my office at home, to the left of my desk, straight up against the wall, hangs a bronze *corpus* without a cross behind it. The arms are outstretched wide. Nail holes in the hands show where a cross, the instrument of suffering and salvation, would usually be.

On first seeing this *corpus* ten years ago, I was drawn to it in a way that I could not quite explain. A decade later, it continues to draw me with no less power and immediacy. It is a museum reproduction of a Romanesque crucifix. On his head, this Christ figure wears a thick, banded crown—not elaborate, but an unmistakable sign of kingship. I had never before seen a crucifix depicting Christ with a temporal crown, and had never thought I'd want to. Yet this image was by no means triumphalistic. Quite the contrary, it told a story which made the image powerfully paradoxical. His body was emaciated—ribs showing, eyes cast down, belly distended like a child's ravished by famine, wrapped only by a remnant of kingly robes that covered his loins.

The *corpus* always quiets me when I look up to it from my work. The suffering eyes and face call forth a sense of longing. The crown speaks to me of strength and opportunity, glory perceived and promised. The torso and limbs speak of surrender and loss.

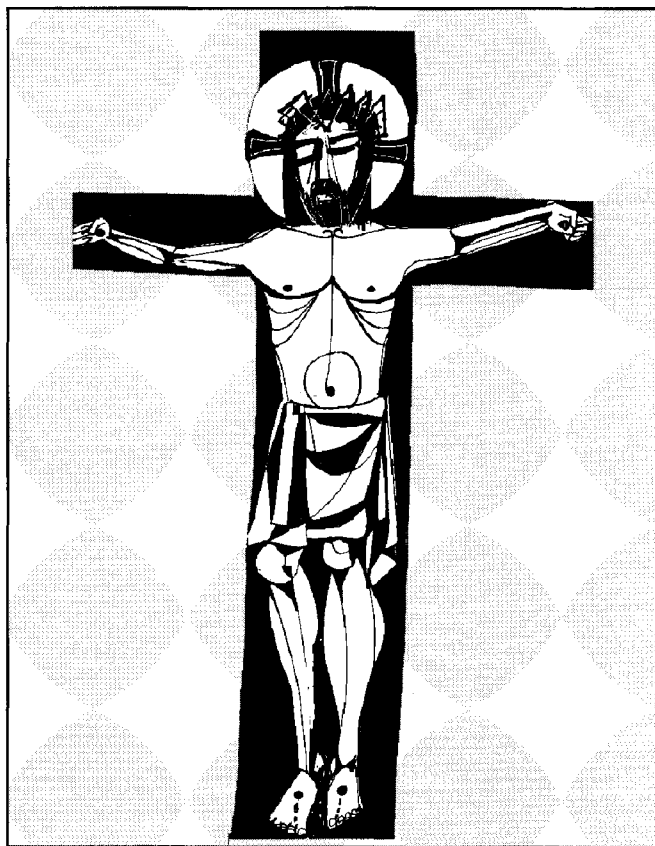
Strength and loss at the same time. This crown on this body has a power over me that I never could have expected. I would expect to be deeply bothered that a symbol of earthly power had replaced the crown of thorns. Images of Christ the King have long been used by monarchs and would-be kings to dominate and oppress. But on the body of this wasted king, this crown signifies cause for trust. Its kingship over my heart could never be twisted to oppress.

Over time, other works of art have spoken to me similarly. A few years ago I found a recording of several poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins, set to song by Benjamin Britten. The one which stood out with the most power was Hopkins's poetic translation, *O Deus, ego amo te*:

O God, I love thee, I love thee —
Not out of hope of heaven for me
Nor fearing not to love and be

Thomas M. Landy, lecturer and assistant to the dean at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts, is the founder and director of Collegium.

In the everlasting burning.
Thou, thou, my Jesus, after me
Didst reach thine arms out dying.
For my sake sufferedst nails and lance,
Mocked and marrèd countenance,
Sorrows passing number,
Sweat and care and cumber,
Yea and death, and this for me,
And thou couldst see me sinning:
Then I, why should not I love thee,
Jesu so much in love with me?
Not for heaven's sake; not to be
Out of hell by loving thee:
Not for any gains I see;
But just the way that thou didst me
I do love and I will love thee:
What must I love thee, Lord, for then?—
For being my king and God. Amen.



Music

When I was a child
I once sat sobbing on the floor
Beside my mother's piano
As she played and sang
For there was in her singing
A shy yet solemn glory
My smallness could not hold

And when I was asked
Why I was crying
I had no words for it
I only shook my head
And went on crying

Why is it that music
At its most beautiful
Opens a wound in us
An ache a desolation
Deep as a homesickness
For some far-off
And half-forgotten country

I've never understood
Why this is so

But there's an ancient legend
From the other side of the world
That gives away the secret
Of this mysterious sorrow

For centuries on centuries
We have been wandering
But we were made for Paradise
As deer for the forest

And when music comes to us
With its heavenly beauty
It brings us desolation
For when we hear it
We half remember
That lost native country

We dimly remember the fields
Their fragrant windswept clover
The birdsongs in the orchards
The wild white violets in the moss
By the transparent streams

And shining at the heart of it
Is the longed-for beauty
Of the One who waits for us
Who will always wait for us
In those radiant meadows

Yet also came to live with us
And wanders where we wander.

Anne Porter

I loved the whole poem, and its setting, but found special resonance in the last two lines. The notion of kingship was not simply triumphal. Jesus was shown to be king through his "nails and lance," "Sweat and care and cumber."

Feminist theologians have rejected kingly images of God as distant and patriarchal, misplaced at best, distorting at worst. Those critiques make sense in terms of most of the ways I had seen Christ's kingship depicted. But those images never appealed to me; I never put energy into overthrowing them. The feast of Christ the King is built on scriptural references and an interesting history, but it never occupied much of my religious imagination. In contrast, I found these newly encountered images of Jesus to be deeply compelling, drawing me into the reality of Jesus' Passion.

More recently I came across two other images of Christ as king that brought tellingly different responses. The first was a lullaby—the most gorgeous of lullabies—an early Samuel Barber song that was recently rediscovered and recorded. Set to a poem by Alfred Noyes, "A Slumber Song of the Madonna," it surprised me by its power to draw me into a paradox that had not quite fit my own Christology:

Sleep, little baby, I love thee;
Sleep, little king, I am bending above thee!
How should I know what to sing
Here in my arms as I sing thee to sleep?
Hushaby low,
Rockaby so.
Kings may have wonderful jewels to bring,
Mother has only a kiss for her king!
Why should my singing so make me to weep?
Only to know that I love thee, I love thee,
Love thee, my little one, sleep.

Whenever I'd seen images of an infant king in the past, I was always put off a little. Their messages of power or prescience—in an infant, no less—showed no signs of human vulnerability. Most puzzling were statues of the Infant of Prague. One of them stood on my mother's dresser as long as I can remember. It was a taken-for-granted part of my religious world, but not one to which I related. Years later, traveling in Prague, I saw in a store window a large poster depicting at least a hundred regal outfits that could be purchased to dress the statue. Impiously, I saw it as a comical "Jesus-as-Barbie" sort of religiosity. A joke I heard later: "What did Mary say when she first saw Jesus dressed as the Infant of Prague?" "You're not going out of this house dressed like *that*!"

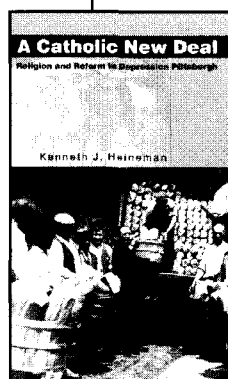
I know that some people still hold the image of the Infant of Prague dear, but it remains difficult for me to grasp what it communicates about the mystery of Christ. If this had remained my primary religious image of divine kingship, I'd never have been drawn to the same level of re-

flection, in the way my *corpus* of the emaciated king has drawn me. The Gospel of John tells us of the inscription on Jesus' cross: *I.N.R.I., Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*. The crucified Jesus is the king of the Jews, and of us all. Barber and Noyes's song of a mother, so moved by the gift of her son, embraces paradox and promise straightforwardly. The Infant of Prague stands on his own and apart; the kingship of the "Slumber Song" is grounded in relationship, made real in the love of a mother who cradles him and who sings out of hope at such new promise, and out of sorrow at her knowledge of life's difficulty and her own poverty. This is a real baby and, as such, in the eyes of a mother, a king.

Shortly after I heard the "Slumber Song" I encountered one more image of Christ the King that stood out, precisely because it was so different from the previous three. Driving past an imposing red-brick church in Boston, I noticed what I'd probably seen many times before, a life-size statue of Christ the King. Painted white and gold, it depicts a strong, healthy Christ wearing a crown and kingly robes, holding an orb in his left hand and raising his right hand in a sign of blessing and peace, his expression pure wisdom, knowledge, and reassurance. It's not a great piece of art, but my indifferent response was not a matter of aesthetics. Had I not been puzzling over my attraction to these other kingly images, I don't know that this statue would have even penetrated beneath the surface of my consciousness. I had a sense that it too was a piece of my own religious tradition, not to be scorned; I knew that it communicated something of value, although it simply did not say enough.

I've increasingly come to believe that capturing the mystery of God, including the mystery of Jesus, takes an ability to recover and honor a wide variety of the images of God that we are heir to. Any image of God yields only limited insight about who God is. Yet at different moments in our lives we all probably need to call upon one single face of God—as Protector, as Wisdom, as Rabbi, as foe of injustice, as the resurrected One. Jane Redmont, writing of her struggle with depression and mental illness, has recounted how it was—to her great surprise—the overwhelming Old Testament image of God as shield that got her through it. Sometimes our hearts cannot absorb any more complexity or paradox. What we need then is to see God in God's utter simplicity.

Over the long haul, I believe the images that will resonate most fully and deeply in us will probably be those that embody the deepest paradoxes, seeming contradictions, truths that overwhelm logic, probability, experience: The vulnerable infant who is almighty God. The just one who is rejected, betrayed, tortured, slain; who was then and is now our worthy king, who conquered death and is our hope. The crown on the *corpus* in my room is no mistake. □



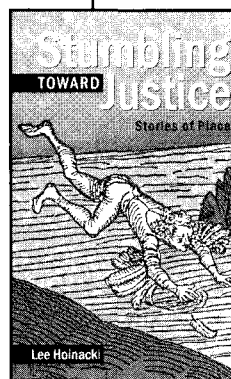
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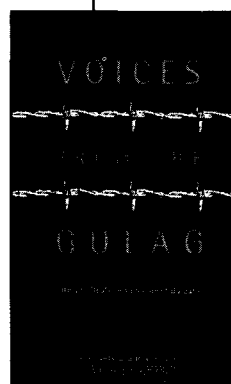
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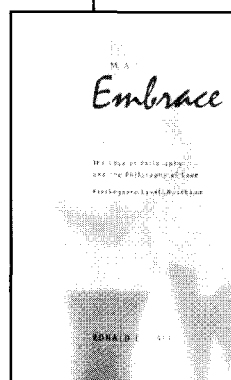


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Just the facts, man

Catholics still marry Catholics

Andrew M. Greeley

For reasons that escape me, the conviction is widespread that younger Catholics are drifting away from the church. Thus an article about Catholics in their thirties in *Commonweal* [July 17, 1998] by a team of scholars associated with The Catholic University of America was headlined with the suggestion that their faith was "loosely held." More recently, Professor Scott Appleby of Notre Dame, in an address to a convocation of Chicago priests, opined that the church was faced with mass defection in his generation. Now Professor James D. Davidson of Purdue University has argued in the September 10, 1999 *Commonweal* that religious mixed marriages have increased because younger Catholics are "less attached to the church" than their predecessors.

I would have thought that the article by The Catholic University team really indicated that young people strongly identify with key elements of their heritage. Professor Appleby's apocalypse was not notably encumbered by data; in fact, available data indicate that the defection rate from Catholicism for non-Hispanics has not changed dramatically from the turn of the century (up only 11 percent). Professor Davidson's findings, however, do deserve more serious attention.

Davidson's essential finding—that more and more American Catholics are marrying outside the church—is a factoid. One ought to, therefore, search for an explanation. Professor Davidson hints at one in his discussion of mixed marriages: There is less pressure now on the partner who is not Catholic to convert to Catholicism—before, during, or after the marriage. Might the increase in exogamy (marrying outside one's faith) be nothing more than that? If, in other words, one allows for that change, might the exogamy rate across various generations or "birth cohorts" be constant? Might those Catholics who were raised Catholic be choosing Catholic-raised spouses at approximately the same rate as earlier in the century?

These questions can be answered by analyzing data from the National Opinion Research Center's *General Social Survey*. Annually, or more recently, biennially, since 1972, NORC has surveyed probability samples of the American population for the National Science Foundation (and other sponsors). Trained interviewers have talked face-to-face (not simply on the telephone, as Davidson seems to suggest) with more than 38,000 respondents of whom 9,408 identified themselves as Catholic. Of these, 7,450 married Catholics, and 5,472 were currently married to a Catholic when inter-

viewed. With a sample of the duration and size of the GSS, it is possible to compare birth cohorts from the beginning of the twentieth century with all birth cohorts throughout the century, and to measure changing patterns of behavior and attitudes. The GSS data, for example, included 520 Catholics born before 1910, interviewed in great part in the early years of the project. How does their exogamy rate compare with that of those born in the 1960s?

The first column of the accompanying table indicates the correctness of Professor Davidson's analysis. More than eight out of ten Catholics born before 1940 were currently married to other Catholics. Moreover, the rates for each cohort (using a technique called dummy variable multiple regression analysis) are significantly different from that of the 1940s' cohort. Those born before the 1940s had higher endogamy rates—that is, they married other Catholics—whereas those born in the 1950s and '60s had lower rates (though there is not a significant difference between those born in the '50s and those born in the '60s, which suggests that the decline may have bottomed out).

The question remains, however, as to whether the absence of pressure for conversion on partners who are not Catholic may account for the decline in endogamy. To answer this question one must look at the propensity of Catholics who were raised Catholic to choose as spouses others who were raised Catholic, a "pure" endogamy rate, as it were, in which there was no pressure for conversion. Fortunately, the GSS also asked questions about the religion in which both the respondent and the spouse were raised.

The second column in the table shows this "pure" endogamy rate—the propensity of Catholics who were raised Catholic to choose as spouses those who were also raised Catholic. Here the results are very different. The endogamous rate of those born before 1910 is significantly higher than the rates of those born after 1910, but, it should be noted, none of the other birth cohorts is significantly different from the 1940s' benchmark. Beginning with the cohort of the 1920s, two out of three Catholic respondents who were raised Catholic have chosen as spouses those who were also raised Catholic. Under a different statistical technique in

Catholic Endogamy Rate by Birth Cohorts

<i>Birth Cohorts</i>	<i>Catholic with Catholic Spouse</i>	<i>Raised Catholic with Spouse Raised Catholic</i>
Before 1910	88 percent*	82 percent*
1910–19	84 percent*	73 percent
1920–29	85 percent*	68 percent
1930–39	81 percent*	70 percent
1940–49	76 percent	68 percent
1950–59	71 percent*	65 percent
1960–69	69 percent*	64 percent

*Difference from 1940–49 is statistically significant.

which the religion in which the spouse was raised and age are taken into account, the correlation between year of birth and endogamy is reduced to statistical insignificance.

It would appear, therefore, that the increase in what the older *monsignori* used to call “those damn mixed marriages” is almost entirely the result of the relaxing of pressures for marital conversions. I doubt that Davidson or anyone else would want to go back to those pressures, even if it were possible—which it certainly is not.

I am prepared for priests to argue that the data do not apply to the situation in their parishes, or for laity to argue that there have been far more mixed marriages in their families. I can only respond, with respect, that they should collect their own national sample data to prove that their experiences are typical and that our data are flawed.

We cannot tell from the data how many of these Catholic/Catholic marriages were contracted in the presence of a priest. Moreover, I am skeptical about trying to manipulate *The Official Catholic Directory* data to answer this question. Bad data tend to drive out good data, especially when it is relatively easy to ask a question about the subject in a survey.

Many young couples report that rectories these days greet them with hostility instead of enthusiasm when they come to apply for marriage, that registration in the parish has replaced baptism as a criterion of a right to the sacrament, that preparation for marriage has become an obstacle course instead of a celebration, and that priests or parish staffs frequently simply deny them the sacraments (for example, if they are living together), usually in direct violation of canon law. I know of some couples who simply go down the street to the local Lutheran church to contract marriage and then continue to attend Mass and receive Communion in the Catholic church. However, in the absence of data, I doubt that this strategy has become common. Most Catholic/Catholic marriages will occur in the Catholic church, despite what bitter taste in their mouths the bride and the groom might have after encountering parish staff. I agree with Davidson that more attention should be paid to young adults by the church (many parishes have no programs at all for them). I also believe that parishes should emphasize celebratory instead of rule-dominated preparation for marriage (many of which rules violate canon law).

Nonetheless, two-thirds of those Catholics who were raised Catholic and were born since 1940 (and, for the most part, came of marriage age after the Second Vatican Council) have chosen marriage partners who were also raised Catholic. Moreover, despite all the social, economic, demographic, cultural, and religious changes in this century, the “pure” endogamy rate has not changed significantly since the 1910–19 cohort. I would suggest that these data lend support for a conclusion opposite from that of Davidson. Young people are still strongly attached to Catholicism, if in their own way. Despite all that we (pope, bishops, priests, lay staff, lay intellectuals) have done to them, we have not been able to drive them away from Catholicism.

I realize that I am virtually the only one in the public arena of the church who holds this position. Nonetheless, the phenomenon which must be explained is not why they leave but why they stay, not why they marry those who were not raised Catholic, but why most of them marry those who, like themselves, were also raised Catholic. It is folly to try to make ecclesiastical policy without asking and attempting to answer these questions. There are several reasons which we might consider.

- Religion in our society is still an important element in a person’s social identity (even though the media and the academy often try to pretend that it is not or perhaps should not be). To choose a Catholic spouse protects and reinforces one’s Catholic identity.

- Religious affiliation is a form of what George Stigler and Gary Becker have called consumption capital: a collection of habits, customs, attitudes, and behaviors in which one has invested considerable time and energy and hence a capital that one is loath to lose or to compromise in an exogamous marriage.

- Catholics like being Catholic. The Catholic stories which reflect the sacramentality and the community and are the core of the Catholic heritage are too good to give up; on the contrary, it is good to have a spouse who shares them.

- Faith—which may well subsume the first three reasons.

To those who think these explanations are absurd, I can only say, again with infinite respect, derive your own explanations for the consistency of the “pure” exogamy rate.

In conclusion, I have always been astonished at the propensity of the clergy (from the pope on down) and the serious thinkers in Catholicism to believe the worst about the Catholic young people and indeed about all the Catholic laity. Granted, the young are Catholic on their own terms now. So, for weal or woe, is everyone else.

Priests seem to exult when they tell me that the latest “October count” (bad data drive out good data, just as bad money drives out good money) shows a decline in church attendance. See how bad the laity are, they seem to be saying. Not one has ever wondered what he might have done to cause the problem. Similarly, the European bishops assembled in synod in Rome this fall were busy blaming everyone and everything in sight (especially vague cultural forces) for the “crisis” in the European church without asking what mistakes they might have made.

No one seems interested in the enormous residual power which might be latent in the Catholic heritage, much less in the solid empirical evidence that this power is still strong, perhaps even indestructible. □

The Reverend Andrew M. Greeley teaches sociology at the University of Chicago and the University of Arizona.

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James Davidson's article on Catholic marriage statistics ["Outside the Church," September 10] is (another) good wake-up call concerning the size of the Catholic crowd no longer beating its way to our parish doors. His views are on target, but the problem is, I believe, larger than he recognizes. Catholics don't marry in the church because many parishes have made it so hard for typical American Catholics to do so.

Despite having no parish connection, I am often asked to help couples marry, basically because they know I will help them and they say that no one else will. I think it's more accurate to say that the combination of their personal and religious mobility and a narrower sense of church membership has turned them into outsiders. They don't get help because, in this new view, they don't have a claim on help.

Personal mobility is a fact of American life. Young Americans typically disconnect from our social institutions in their later teens and become personally and socially mobile. They don't register to vote, they don't belong to organizations, don't have medical insurance, don't join parishes. And Americans don't reconnect usually until they start raising their own children. Often the first act in the process for plugging in again is trying to find a place to be married. And it is a tough act. Many clergy, despite what I believe are their canonical obligations, will marry only those people who fit their own, personal definitions of church membership.

Where did this new view come from? Robert Bellah answered that question in these pages years ago. American religious individualism has overwhelmed the traditionally Catholic view of the church as the Body of Christ, where the church is ontologically prior to the individual and membership comes sacramentally through baptism. In its place is the more individualist view of the church as an assembly of believers, where membership comes through individual

commitment. And, in this essentially congregational model, turning the religiously mobile away makes perfect sense. They don't belong. And if Catholic theology says that baptism makes them belong just as much as the pope, then too bad for theology.

Those of us who believe that one toe in the door beats two feet outside are a disappearing group. Our program-oriented churches seem determined to convince themselves that there is a bureaucratic alternative to the human art of welcoming people. Bishop John Cummins of Oakland once commented that one of our priests was a wonderful pastor because he was such a good host. People on the outside know when they are welcome

and when they're not. And mobile young Catholics are parish outsiders. Wanting to see people come to terms with the demands of religious commitments is a good long-term goal. Requiring that as a prerequisite to marrying them is, in effect, to close the doors in their face because it is asking them to make an institutional commitment at the time in their lives when, we are told, they are least prepared to do so. At the very least that demand is not smart.

A better, and much more Catholic, alternative is to bring them in and focus any discussion on the words of the marriage vows themselves, not on acts of clerical fealty.

And that, I fear, is the real issue underlying demands for institutional commitment. If they understand the vows, and are prepared to love and honor each other all the days of their lives, as the vows ask of them, then they are prepared in the way the church requires. If that focus on their own relationship is followed with pastoral good sense, then as the other issues come up in the normal course of life—birth, parenting, education, and death—the chances are that the couple will be visible members of the church, since people have a way of being where they are wanted, needed, and helped.

DAVID K. O'ROURKE

David K. O'Rourke, O.P., a former pastor, serves on the marriage tribunal in the Diocese of Oakland, California.



*"It's called 'marriage'—
it's part of the New Morality."*

Richard Alleva

DAMES AT WAR

'The Messenger' & 'Dogma'



The nuns at school had told me Shakespeare was great and so, twelve years old, I tuned in public television to watch the BBC's *An Age of Kings*, Shakespeare's English history plays done in chronological order. The nuns were right. I loved the pageantry and the bugle flourishes and the bellowing and, most of all, the swordplay. But the good sisters had even more often told me that Joan of Arc was one of the greatest saints in the Christian calendar, so you can imagine my Catholic schoolboy shock when, in the middle of *Henry VI Part 1*, "Joan Pucelle," routed by the English forces on the plains of Anjou, paused midflight to pray to certain "speedy helpers." The camera zoomed in on Joan's eyes and we saw demons dancing there who, fickle as only fiends can be, now denied her their protection even when she offered to "lop a member off, and give it you/ In earnest of a further benefit." "Joan of Arc a witch? Feeding fiends with her own blood! Yipes!!

After the first shock, there is no other. Perhaps this is why the latest Joan drama, *The Messenger*, leaves me amused and intrigued rather than dismayed. As written by Andrew Birkin and Luc Besson (also the director) and enacted by Milla Jovovich, this Jeanne d'Arc is as much a creature for our time as Shakespeare's was for his. Just as a post-Reformation English audience needed a witch, we require a noble neurotic seen through a Grand Guignol prism because ours is a rationalistic age which, paradoxically, loves to sup on horrors. Though a genius such as Carl Dreyer dared to offer, in his *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, "a solemnly militant, whole-souled woman refusing to abdicate the moral of her life" (film critic Parker Tyler), a lesser man must cater to the *zeitgeist*. (Shakespeare was not yet

a titan when he gave us his vivid caricature.) And so Besson's Jeanne d'Arc is as sick-souled as they come and, at the movie's climax, renounces her worldly actions as the products of self-delusion.

She begins as an escapee from *The Sound of Music*, confessing to an exasperated priest thrice a day (which turns the poor cleric into a high-school guidance counselor: "Is everything all right at home, Jeanne?"). Tripping merrily down sun-dappled hills and across flower-bedecked meadows, grooving on her own purity and closeness to God, this barely pubescent girl has a vision of Christ as a solemn child. Then a sword appears beside her on the grass just before the sunshine morphs into green gloom and foreboding. A company of enemy soldiers raids her village and their officer murders and rapes (yes, in that order) her older sister. Tormented by a guilty conscience (her sister surrendered her hiding place to Jeanne), our heroine transforms herself into a warrior who will simultaneously

avenge her sibling and mystically unite herself with Christ. And since her sister tried to defend herself with a blade against an attacker who sneered, "Oh, a woman with a sword," Jeanne becomes that very "woman with a sword" at whom Brit warriors will sneer at their peril. She wins the Dauphin's confidence, raises the siege at Orleans, sees her prince crowned, suffers betrayal into the hands of the English, and is thrown into prison.

At this point, *The Messenger* takes a queer turn indeed, but an interesting one. In her cell, Jeanne is confronted by a phantom (Dustin Hoffman at his most saturnine) who proceeds to show the girl that her entire military mission is founded on a delusion. Who is this phantom? (In the credits he's listed as The Conscience, but why does a peasant girl's conscience talk like a psychiatrist?) Since he identifies himself as an aged version of the sad child in Jeannne's childhood vision, mustn't we take him to be Christ? I kept anticipating that he would sooner or later drop his holy credentials, turn out to be the devil (like the satanic little girl in *The Last Temptation of Christ*), and get the heave-ho by Jeanne, who would then go, head high, to her blazing martyrdom.

I was naive. Luc Besson is very much a creature of our time, and for him chivalry is dead and buried, and he doesn't mind enlisting Jesus to hold the stake that



he wants to drive through the corpse's heart. This phantasmal Jesus *cum* Grand Inquisitor *cum* medieval Freud, leads Jeanne through the turning points of her life, makes her see how she misinterpreted her "voices" for the sake of relieving her neuroses by way of a glorious crusade, and finally elicits from her the confession that "I did all the things people do for a cause." In context, those "things" include warfare's indiscriminate slaughter. Like Raskolnikov, like the hero of *Darkness at Noon*, like David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*, this Jeanne d'Arc of Luc Besson and Andrew Birkin is an idealist who besmirched herself for the sake of a vision and now, seeing the blood on her hands, renounces the vision itself.

The movie is executed with bruising gusto. Besson, like Ken Russell and Oliver Stone, is a director of great skill and no subtlety. (He didn't need subtlety for his excellent espionage melodrama, *La Femme Nikita*.) During the murder of Jeanne's sister, a subtle director would have kept his camera trained on Jeanne cowering in her hiding place, her face registering the horrors she hears. But Besson serves up murder and rape as a feast for the senses with close shots of the sword slicing through the body, blood trickling out of the victim's mouth, etc., etc. In fact, all the forces in the movie—actors, horses, war machines, natural elements—are launched straight at the viewer all the time. There is little sense of proportion, everything is *fortissimo*.

Besson has, however, learned some maneuvers from old cinematic masters. He's obviously studied *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and tries to attain the Dreyerian effect that Pauline Kael described so well: "Dreyer turns the camera on the faces of Joan and the judges, and in giant close-ups he reveals his interpretation of their emotions. In this enlargement, Joan and her persecutors are shockingly fleshly—isolated with their sweat, warts, spittle, and tears, and (as no one in the film used makeup) with startlingly individual contours, features, and skin." Something like that effect obtains in the new movie, but here we are not so much interpreting emotions (Besson's schematic approach doesn't allow us the freedom to inter-

pret) as flipping through a book of mug shots. Similarly, Besson assembles his Orleans battle much as Orson Welles edited the combat at Shrewsbury in *Chimes at Midnight*—they both orchestrate fragments of slaughter instead of broad vistas. But Welles's battle really was a symphony while Besson's is just a series of shrewd gross-outs and shocks.

On the plus side, the management of the Jeanne-Phantom colloquies is claustrophobically powerful and inventive, and Milla Jovovich's performance, composed at first of shrieks and eye-popping because her director wanted her to seem psychologically tortured, gets progressively better as the movie grows more introspective. In the supporting cast, John Malkovich turns his always unsettling personality to good account as the Dauphin, and Tcheky Karyo convinces as Dunois, a sane soldier near the end of his tether.

At its best, *The Messenger* approaches art and even at its worst is pretty enjoyable high camp. But, all in all, the movie is skin deep. When this Maid of Orleans is charred at the stake, you just can't believe her psychoanalyzed spirit marches on.

Bethany, the heroine of *Dogma*, could be considered a modern American Joan of Arc, though that would slight Bethany. The Maid of Orleans, after all, merely had to rescue France from England while Bethany's supernatural enlistment officer, the angel Metatron, sends her to stop two fallen angels from finding redemption at a church in New Jersey, a redemption that would reverse God's judgment and thereby annihilate all existence.

This mission-from-God stuff is just a framework on which the writer-director Kevin Smith hangs a lot of good and bad gags designed to tweak organized religion in general and the Roman Catholic faith in particular. I laughed or groaned at the jokes, but was all too familiar with the mentality producing them to take any offense. Sitting around dormitory rooms or cafeteria tables during my years at Catholic U., I encountered countless wiseacres who might have ceased going

to Mass but were satirically obsessed with Catholic dogma, hierarchy, mores, and style. They were always forthcoming with fantasy-scenarios featuring such situations as God coming down to earth and...God's a woman! a pro-abortion feminist woman! who's...uh...black and...no, wait, I've got it, a black lesbian with a leather fetish. Now guess what happens when she calls the pope on the carpet! It never took long to recognize that the raconteur was like a bewildered, discarded wife obsessed with the quirks of her ex-husband, though she wouldn't take him back even if he came crawling. So, whether *Dogma* is cutting-edge art or a blot on human decency, there can't be any doubt that it's an inside job.

As storytelling, it's a mess. Kevin Smith keeps putting obstacles in the path of his narrative and the plot falls over every single one of them. Just one example among multitudes: While writing the script, Smith must have realized that even if Bethany doesn't rescue humanity, God could always intervene. So, for the sake of suspense, he invents an explanation that God is trapped in the body of a patient on life support. *Lame*.

Still, I liked the movie's insolence, its occasionally eloquent dialogue (especially Metatron's touching monologue about how he had to tell the child Jesus of his fate), its special effects (God literally roars Ben Affleck's head off—cool!), the way Smith uses over-the-top violence to give an apocalyptic charge to the last segment of his story without dispelling its comic nature, and, most of all, the way Salma Hayek, as a muse-angel turned stripper, chews bubble gum while dancing on top of a bar. Also not to be sniffed at are two excellent performances: Alan Rickman as Metatron, who has the funniest lines in the script, and Linda Fiorentino as Bethany, who has no funny lines whatsoever but who, in the midst of bodies falling out of the sky and rebel angels slaughtering New Jersey congregations, still manages to convey more sense of divine mission than ever prevails in *The Messenger*.

And a very Merry Christmas to The Catholic League. □

Little comfort given

A Gesture Life

Chang-rae Lee

Riverhead, \$23.95, 356 pp.

Valerie Sayers

Chang-rae Lee, after only two novels, has already established himself as what reviewers like to call "an important voice" in American fiction. I'm more inclined to call it a crucial voice. Lee writes with such urgency, such invention, such intelligence, and such fidelity to the truth of his characters' lives that I have been pressing his books on friends, students, and innocent bystanders as novels that must be read.

Lee's first novel, *Native Speaker* (1995), explores the twentieth-century immigrant experience from the perspective of a young Korean-American whose father has labored his way to wealth in the fruit-markets of New York. What is most striking—besides the novel's easy assurance—is Lee's decision to move his narrative right up to the boundaries of realism, as if to acknowledge realism's limitations in portraying the pain of immigrants. *Native Speaker's* protagonist, Henry Park, works for a nearly surreal spy agency, uncovering the secret lives of other immigrants. The novel shifts between Henry's suggestive detective role (his spy business is familiar in a fantastic, cinematic way) and his domestic life (painstakingly realistic). The seesawing between the public and the private, the real and the almost-real, allows a precarious balance, with Henry's almost unspeakable emotions suggested primarily by indirection.

A Gesture Life, Lee's new novel, matches *Native Speaker* in ambition, scope, and balance, and also acknowledges the lim-

its of conventional historical realism in exploring the unthinkable. It is, however, a very different kind of book: *Native Speaker's* charged, energetic language disappears here in favor of a more formal (and completely engaging) first-person narrative voice. The subject at the novel's heart is the plight of the Korean "comfort women" of World War II, young women tricked and drafted into service as sex slaves to Japanese soldiers. The only scenes that may approach surrealism in a reader's mind are, in fact, the completely realistic (though restrained) wartime scenes. But *A Gesture Life* is not a history of the comfort women; it is an exploration of the lifelong effects of their victimization on one of the soldiers asked to victimize them. Lee opens his story of Franklin Hata, a Japanese of Korean birth, in the present. Hata is an upstanding citizen of Westchester County, New York, an immigrant who has built a thriving business, Sunny Medical Supply, and who has now retired, wealthy and well-respected. Hata is a man of impeccable manners—the gestures of the title—who has calculated precisely the moves he must make to be accepted in his community. The purposeful, dignified, pleasant language Lee uses to depict Hata is a reflection of the man. His wealthy suburb suits his predilection for privacy: "In this

area of expansive two- and three-acre lots, there is no such thing as gabbing over a hedge."

Lee's characterization of American suburbs is as quietly devastating as his characterization of this man who has hidden away his past. "It's hard for others to know how consuming one's arrival in a new land can be, how it will take up the very last resources of spirit," Hata says, acknowledging what immigration has cost him. It is harder for him to acknowledge what it has cost his adopted daughter Sunny, who has been at first dutiful, then resentful, later openly rebellious. A supposedly accidental fire in his house (there are no accidents in Freud or in fiction) leads Hata on an internal exploration of his past. He moves simultaneously down two paths of memory: one of his life with Sunny, who fled his house in favor of life with a drug dealer, and one of his experiences with the comfort women.

Each story is compelling, but their juxtaposition allows Lee to explore each fully and to cut away precisely at the moment when melodrama looms. The stories are, of course, related, and require Hata to confront the sexuality of his daughter, who chooses promiscuity for rebellion and escape, and that of the comfort women, who are raped systematically

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and have no means of escape. The two roads intersect at the point of Hata's responsibilities to these women. We learn that Hata, as a young medical officer, was put in charge of the "volunteers." He fell in love with one and now must confront his complicity in their captivity.

Lee's structural decisions in telling this complicated story reflect both his aesthetic and his moral sensibilities. The wartime scenes are remarkable feats of narrative control; they suggest fully the horrors visited on the comfort women (and the dehumanizing effects of the soldiers' own actions on themselves) but they never indulge in narrative voyeurism. The restraint of the dramatization grants the women a dignity they were not granted historically. The novel is not perfect (though it's close); one device Lee resorts to repeatedly is setting Hata in close proximity to other characters, so that he can overhear them or watch them without actually being in the scene. Such are the pitfalls of the first-person narrative. Generally, though, Lee's skills are so sure that a reader moves effortlessly through these pages, emotionally draining though they are. The connections among the different truths of Hata's life are peeled away with skill and delicacy.

Lee is a political writer, but his two novels aim at very different political targets. In *Native Speaker*, Lee is provocateur, catching the reader off guard by portraying a sympathetic character who is nonetheless an equal-opportunity spy, betraying disciples of Ferdinand Marcos and Chinese democracy alike. *A Gesture Life*, because it is dealing with a once-hidden, now well-known horror of World War II, has a narrower political focus and a clearer political point. The real power of Lee's witness lies in his willingness to connect a specific set of horrors to a much larger human tendency to conceal and to repress, to hide the truth behind material goods. Furthermore, Franklin Hata's story is generous enough to allow for the possibility of redemption. *A Gesture Life* is an important novel—indeed, a crucial novel. □

Valerie Sayers is a novelist and professor of English at the University of Notre Dame.

A BLOCK OF GRANITE

When Pride Still Mattered

A Life of Vince Lombardi

David Maraniss

Simon & Schuster, \$26, 541pp.

Neil Coughlan

It's not as if you aren't warned. "When Pride Still Mattered"? David Maraniss is pitching the good old days: football when color photos were beside the point because the men themselves came in black-and-white, grainy, grim. In the first paragraph of his preface, Maraniss, embarrassed, grabs your lapels and tells you he has used his awful title "with a certain irony." Don't believe him.

Vince Lombardi and the Green Bay Packers are a wonderful sports story. When Lombardi came to the Packers in 1959, the team had not had a winning season since 1947. Professional football, a prime beneficiary of the advances in television camera technology in the 1950s, was about to become the remarkable entertainment phenomenon we have today. The league's other small-town franchises (the Portsmouth Spartans, Frankfort Yellowjackets, and such) had disappeared by the mid-1930s, and Green Bay's days were numbered. Lombardi, from Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn, a guard on Fordham University's "Seven Blocks of Granite" line of the 1936 season, turned it all around. In his first year, the Packers, who had won only one game the year before, won seven and lost five. The next year they lost to Philadelphia in the league title game. "This will never happen again," Lombardi told them, "you will never lose another championship." They were the champions the next year and the year after, and in 1965, 1966, and 1967, winning the first two Super Bowls in those last two years. By then the league had changed its college player draft to prevent Lombardi

from drafting underclassmen to stockpile future winners. If the NFL hadn't changed that rule, Lombardi said, "no one would ever catch us." All the while, the television cameras were bringing us ever more intimate images of the brilliant, brutal play.

After the second Super Bowl victory, Lombardi, burned out, quit coaching the Packers. He spent a year watching his team lose, raging behind plastic glass in a booth above the field, and then left to coach Edward Bennett Williams's feeble Washington Redskins. Again, Lombardi won in his first year. He died of cancer before the next season.

A wonderful sports story. But Maraniss, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his biography of Bill Clinton, *First in His Class*, can't leave it at that. If you're a serious fellow, you can't author a mere sports story, not in the age of Bob Costas and Doris Kearns Goodwin. No, your story must have...meaning. It was the "ambiguity of [Lombardi's] meaning in American culture," Maraniss tells us, that drove the author as he researched the book. (The "meaning," you won't be surprised to hear, is old-time decent subordination to the team and the goal—no hot-dogging, please.) And the economics of publishing now requires a big book, a big trade book, 500 pages, photographs, nice jacket,...the works.

Truth is, most of us don't live 500-pages' worth. Lombardi didn't. Maraniss is dauntless, though, and one way or another he gets there. He leaves out nothing. The long pages of why-am-I-reading-this? are relieved only occasionally by flashes of pure lunacy. "Little Ricky was gone by then. The dachshund scrambled for daylight whenever the front door opened, even on the bleakest of northern Wisconsin days, and one morning he made a vain effort to flee across the street and was struck by a snowplow. Marie [Vince's wife] took him to the vet and had him put to sleep, then broke the news to [the Lombardi children] Susan and Vincent, a more difficult task than the time back in New Jersey when she had to tell them

that she had gassed their pet duck." (Remember Oscar Wilde on Dickens? "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing.")

Another way to bulk it up—find the roots of everything. After all, you wouldn't write a biography of Saint Augustine and not ferret out the psychological origins of his ecclesiology. Lombardi, also an important guy, deserves no less. So....coach Lombardi made his players practice till it hurt. Hurt....Ah, yes, pain. "Images of pain shaped his ancestral homeland of southern Italy, both the Neapolitan region of his father's Lombardis and the remote mountain village of Vietri di Potenza, home to his mother's Izzo clan. The people of southern Italy shared a history of pain on the largest scale fathomable: centuries of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, mudslides, epidemics, revolts, famines, invasions, counterreformations, a communal memory of the works of man collapsing, crumbling, shaking, corpses burning, bodies thrown into the sea. In southern Italy pain was a constant of the human condition, the defining theme of religion and art. Paintings of flagellation, crucifixion, stigmata, biblical tragedies, luminous and muscular, with intimations of breathtaking pain. Pain was its own reward, to be endured, gloried [gloried?], but not overcome...." And on and on, paragraphs more of this nonsense on how Vince came to pain. Well, as the opening sentence of the book ("Everything begins with the body of the father") portends, Maraniss eventually finds or concocts an origin for each element in the Lombardi package—work, play, discipline, invention, you name it. The top- per, I suppose, is his tracing the signature Green Bay running play, the power sweep, to *The Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius Loyola.

Despite Maraniss's best efforts, a picture of an interesting man emerges from the book. Lombardi was as driven and effective a man as ever went to work. (His home and family life, on the other hand, is a tale of inattention and incomprehension, painful to read.) His astonishing intensity, by turns abusive and tender, his quick passages from rage to satisfied laughter, worked wonderfully in football, a sport where co-

ordinated explosive physical aggression carries the day. He would have been a disaster in baseball. Or would he? Would Lombardi have found a way to win there, too? Here Maraniss has it exactly right. "The will to succeed was his dominant characteristic, stronger in the end than his insistence on having things his way. If he had to adjust, he would find the means; it was a talent that he exhibited for the rest of his coaching career, though it often went unrecognized, overshadowed by his public image as

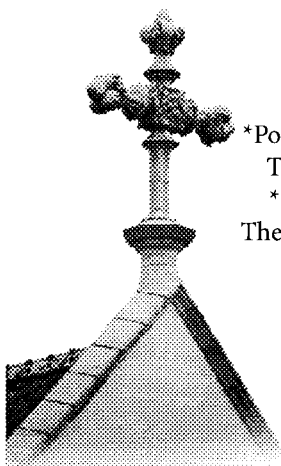
the implacable leader who demanded that the world adapt to him."

If someone who knows you are not to be disturbed on Fall Sunday afternoons lays Maraniss's book on you for Christmas, skip the first couple hundred pages, get to Green Bay with Lombardi in February, 1959, and read a bit. Hidden in all the horse feathers is a wonderful sports story. □

Neil Coughlan, the author of *Young John Dewey*, is a lawyer living in Connecticut.

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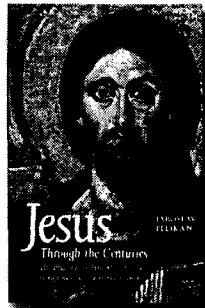
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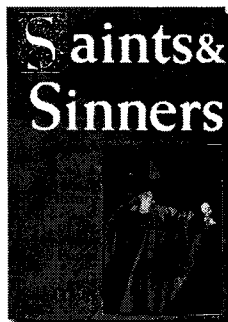
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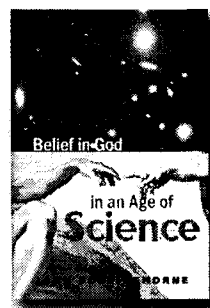
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MACKEREL SNAPPERS

Boston Catholics

A History of the Church and Its People

Thomas H. O'Connor

Northeastern University Press,
\$28.95, 357 pp.

Anthony D. Andreassi

Growing up Jewish in Boston in the 1930s, the journalist Nat Hentoff had an understandably negative view of Catholics. In *Boston Boy*, Hentoff described how he and his friends were threatened and beaten up on several occasions by young Irish Catholic toughs, simply for being Jews. In a city where referees sometimes halted basketball games on Sunday afternoon so that everyone could listen to the anti-Semitic radio tirades of Father Charles E. Coughlin, Jews like Hentoff looked with fear and contempt on the Catholic church, and even had a custom of spitting at churches when driving by (as long as no one was looking). By the first half of the twentieth century the Catholic church in Boston occupied a position of power that could both inspire and repel. That had not always been the case.

In *Boston Catholics*, Thomas O'Connor, professor emeritus of history at Boston College, traces the transformation of that group from a small, persecuted minority to the city's dominant religious bloc. Before the Revolutionary War, few Catholics lived in New England, where Puritan loathing of papists ran deep. In 1768, in the approach to hostilities with Great Britain, Samuel Adams commented that American colonists had more to fear from "the growth of popery" than from the Stamp Act. It was not until 1788 that Mass could be celebrated publicly in Boston, and, as late as 1790, the Catholic population numbered fewer

than five hundred, with one priest to serve them.

With the rapid growth of the Catholic population in the first decades of the nineteenth century (thanks to large-scale Irish immigration), anti-Catholic sentiment increased. The middle decades of the century witnessed an especially virulent wave of nativist prejudice, and Boston is remembered for the infamous burning in 1844 of the Ursuline convent in Charlestown by a Protestant mob—while local firemen stood by doing nothing. Though violence like this became less common as the years went on and the Catholic population continued to increase, anti-Catholic prejudice persisted and exhibited itself in more subtle ways. O'Connor has already told this part of the story in *Fitzpatrick's Boston*, his admirable study of the city's third bishop.

Just as it did in other large urban dioceses, the church in Boston grew exponentially between the Civil War and World War II. When Bishop John Joseph Williams succeeded Fitzpatrick in 1866, he found a Catholic community of about 300,000 (mostly of Irish descent) and 116 priests to minister to them. At his death in 1907, the Archdiocese of Boston (it was made a metropolitan see in 1875) had a Catholic population of more than 850,000 with upwards of 200 parishes, 600 priests, and 1,600 women religious. This growth continued under William Henry O'Connell, Boston's first cardinal, who literally "reigned" in Boston from 1907 until his death in 1944.

Described by one historian as sometimes more Roman than Catholic and more Catholic than Christian, O'Connell ruled his archdiocese with an iron fist, demanding absolute obedience from both clergy and laity. However, it was not always smooth sailing for "Gangplank Bill." (O'Connell earned that sobriquet thanks to the regular newspaper pictures of him as he departed on his many cruises.) In 1920 the ecclesiastical authorities discovered that O'Connell's priest-nephew, whom he had appointed chancellor of the

archdiocese, was secretly married to a woman in New York City whom he visited every week. All the New England bishops (with one exception) asked Rome to remove O'Connell from office. Since the general public knew nothing of the scandal, Rome declined to act, but it was the end of O'Connell's ambition to succeed Baltimore Cardinal James Gibbons as the leader of the American hierarchy.

Nevertheless, O'Connell's influence remained strong on his home turf. Boston's city fathers usually consulted with O'Connell, known as "Number One" by state legislators, on important matters. In 1937 O'Connell breached the inner sanctum of Yankee society when he presided at the first Mass ever celebrated in Harvard Stadium. By mid-century the Catholic church in Boston had reached full stature and no longer had to defer to the once-dominant Protestant ruling class.

In terms of statistics, the Boston Catholic church saw its golden age in the postwar era, as did the rest of U.S. Catholicism. When Richard Cushing was named archbishop in 1945, he inherited an institutional church supported by a thick Catholic culture. Between 1945 and 1960 the Catholic population grew by at least a quarter of a million in each five-year period. This was matched by increases in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. By 1960 there were more than 5,500 nuns in the archdiocese and 400-plus young men enrolled in the diocesan seminaries.

However, the subtle winds of change could be felt as early as the 1950s. Though the number of priests was still increasing, it was not growing at nearly the same rate as the general Catholic population. By 1966 astute observers realized that the halcyon days were over. In that year, Cushing was devastated when a hundred of his own seminarians picketed a talk he was delivering to protest the rules at Saint John's Seminary in Brighton. Like New York's Cardinal Francis Spellman (another Bostonian), Cushing died just as the full effect of the changes of Vatican II and the Vietnam War were being felt in parishes throughout the archdiocese. Everywhere in the U.S. Catholic church a new style of episcopal leader-

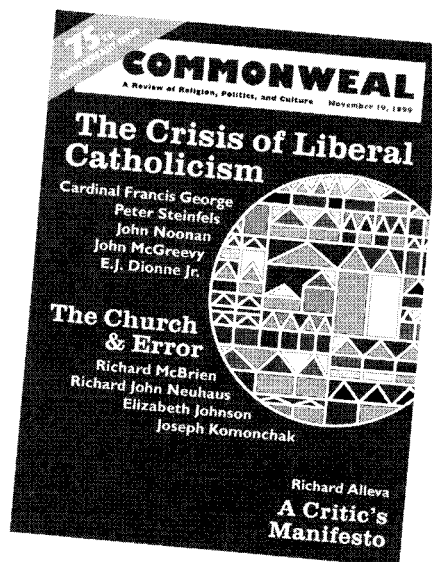
ship was needed, and in Boston that task fell to Cushing's successor, Humberto Medeiros.

The first non-Irishman appointed to Boston in over a century, Medeiros born in the Portuguese Azores in 1915, had come to the United States in 1931 when his family settled in Fall River. When Medeiros was named archbishop of Boston in 1970, he shepherded the archdiocese with quiet, gentle leadership in a tumultuous period marked by both radical experimentation and great uncertainty. After all of his predecessors had presided over the institutional expansion of the church, Medeiros witnessed its contraction. More than a hundred Catholic schools were closed and Sunday Mass attendance fell by 25 percent. Through no fault of his own, Medeiros will forever be associated with the Boston archdiocese during some of its most troubled years.

Since O'Connor courageously takes his study up to the present, he attempts the tricky task of writing history about the living. In discussing Cardinal Bernard Law, the author honestly and accurately points out the strong conservatism of the present archbishop and offers a hesitant and measured evaluation of his leadership. Despite O'Connor's evenhandedness, one might wonder if he should have ended his book with the death of Medeiros. For the most part, historians do best when they stick to the past. Still, O'Connor is a yarn spinner as well as an accomplished historian. He tells the tale of Boston's Catholics with grace, charm, and deep affection. □

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The special 75th anniversary double issue of **Commonweal** (November 19) on the CRISIS OF LIBERAL CATHOLICISM offers a stimulating, multi-faceted discussion, featuring: Cardinal Francis George, Peter Steinfels, John Noonan, John McGreevy, and E.J. Dionne, Jr.



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Sixth Sense, The	16:20 S 24
Stanley Kubrick, 1928-99	8:19 Ap 23
Star Wars, Episode I	13:19 Jl 16
Thin Red Line, The	5:15 Mr 12
Red Violin, The	11:19 Je 4
You've Got Mail	2:22 Ja 29

Stage, by Celia Wren

Anna Karenina	1:17 Ja 15
Annie Get Your Gun	9:17 My 7
Blue Room, The	4:19 Fe 26
Civil War, The	11:22 Je 4
Electra	2:23 Ja 29
Moses, My Love	1:17 Ja 15
'New Visions' at Lincoln Center	7:33 Ap 9
Not about Nightingales	9:16 My 7
Notes from Underground	15:24 S 10
Phèdre	4:20 Fe 26
Stavrogin's Confession	15:25 S 10
Weir, The	11:21 Je 4
Wit	2:23 Ja 29

Media, by Celia Wren

'New York'	19:20 N 5
'The West Wing'	21:17 D 3

Exhibit, by Elizabeth Kirkland Cahill

Such Friends: W.B. Yeats	14:20 Ag 13
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Art, by Donna Gustafson

Getty at the Morgan	8:20 Ap 23
Cézanne to van Gogh	13:20 Jl 16

Art, by Patrick Jordan

Anselm Kiefer	3:18 Fe 12
Treasury of Saint Francis	10:18 My 21

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

when it comes to baptism or marriage, etc. In the 1970s I worked with Frederick McManus of the bishops' committee on liturgy and others to draft an ecumenical marriage rite for Christians—Protestants and Roman Catholics. We did it!

In those days "interfaith" was used for Jewish-Christian services and weddings. "Ecumenical" was used for marriages among Christians. When Professor Davidson talks about "interfaith marriages," one presumes he means rites uniting Roman Catholics with Protestants of various denominations. These are Christian weddings, presuming Christian baptism of both parties, whether the rite/sacrament is performed in a Catholic or Protestant church.

As a working pastor, I can testify that the number of Roman Catholics coming to Protestant churches to apply for marriage is dramatically increasing, and that the types of these applications are changing as well. Probably one of every two weddings in this parish involves at least one Roman Catholic. Applications from divorced Catholics who do not want to apply for annulments are also increasing. (Protestant pastors will not do annulment-pending weddings.)

Of interest to me as a pastor, now in my forty-fifth active year, is that the Catholic party applying for a first marriage is often not interested in inviting a Catholic priest to bless or co-officiate at the wedding.

Also on the rise is the number of marriages between two Catholics, usually in their twenties or thirties, who apply to a Protestant pastor for their wedding ceremony. There is a wide range of issues leading hundreds of thousands of younger Roman Catholics to seek the sacraments in U.S. Protestant churches.

A frequent dilemma for me is that Roman Catholics request the Eucharist at their wedding. They are fully aware that it is against canon law for Catholics to receive the Body and Blood of Christ under a Protestant (non-Catholic, if you will!) form; they are also appalled by what seems to them bad manners when the programs

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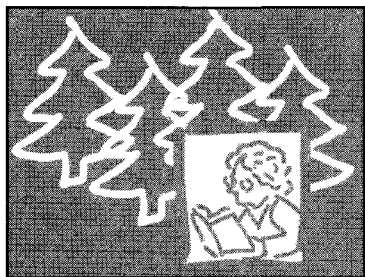
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at Catholic weddings stipulate that Protestants are not welcome to receive.

The dilemma: Should an ecumenically minded "non-Catholic" pastor be respectful of the Roman canons, or not? You tell me! In my tradition the Eucharist is open for all baptized Christians. For Professor Davidson's edification, when "lapsed" Catholics request the Eucharist at their wedding, I am always surprised to see dozens and dozens of Roman Catholics for the very first time reverently come forward. This trend, too, is growing.

Off and on over the years I have subscribed to any number of Roman journals and magazines. *Commonweal* is clearly trying to increase its circulation. But if you run essays like Professor Davidson's affected little survey, folks like this new subscriber will be saying, "Is he for real?" and, to *Commonweal*, "Let's talk sense on the eve of 2000 for all Christendom."

(REV.) M. LAWRENCE SNOW
Simsbury, Conn.

The writer is pastor of the Simsbury United Methodist Church. [For more on this subject, see articles on pages 14 & 16.]

Count California in

With all due respect, I find the penultimate sentence in Richard John Neuhaus's "*Sentire cum Ecclesia*" [November 19] ("*It is Rome or California*") full of the kind of arrogance and triumphalism that has driven so many away from the church in the past and will continue to drive thoughtful Christians and others away in the future. Until the Roman church goes beyond the limited, proscriptive mindset implicit in that kind of rhetoric and realizes that the church is Jerusalem *and* Rome *and* Canterbury *and* Constantinople *and* Wittenberg *and* Iona (*and*, for that matter, California), it will continue to be what Cardinal Francis George so correctly, and somewhat ironically, criticizes in the same issue of *Commonweal* as an institution "obsessed with particular practices and so sectarian in its outlook that it cannot serve as a sign of unity of all peoples in Christ."

LARRY HANSEN
Aloha, Oreg.

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OVERDUE AT THE LIBRARY

Timothy P. Schilling

I still remember clearly when I first noted the interesting relationship between our primary definitions of the word "conception." I was in my second year in the seminary and I was struggling with a decision about continuing to ordination.

The crux of my struggle was a common one among seminarians: I felt a longing for physical intimacy that put me in tension with my celibate commitment. Would I have the wherewithal and trust and creativity that the celibate life requires? Was this way of loving the right one for me?

It was during this time that I first heard, really heard, the stories of the barren women in the Bible. These women, though "conceiving," could not conceive. They had the *idea* of bearing a child but not the flesh of it. They could *imagine* it, but could not experience the physical fulfillment. I identified with them because more than anything I desired the enfleshment of love—not just in the form of sexual intimacy, though that was surely central, but in the whole range of physical intimacy that is appropriate to family life. This reflection was critical to my decision, finally, to leave the seminary. Four years later I married.

Over the past seven months, I have recalled that earlier period of my life many times, as I have watched my wife grow in her pregnancy. This is our first child, and nothing could be more mysterious and intriguing to me than watching our child arise who previously did not exist. In particular, it is the great gap that gets me: between the wispy "conception"—the idea of having a child, the fleeting procreative moment, the small beginning of someone—and the present living, squirming, incarnate being.

In some ways, as a male, I will always be removed from the fullest experience of this wondrous process. Whereas my

wife is unavoidably aware of the child who is growing within her, sometimes I have to remind myself that any of this is happening at all, especially when I am away from her at work. Ironically, it is *mindfulness* that brings me back to the physical blossoming of my wife and child. I have made it a point to pray the rosary for them as a way of staying in touch when we are apart. I take pleasure in repeating the phrase "the fruit of thy womb," and frequently my prayer leads me into speculations about how Mary in her womb contains the Word through whom all things were made. In a sense, Mary bears all of creation within her.

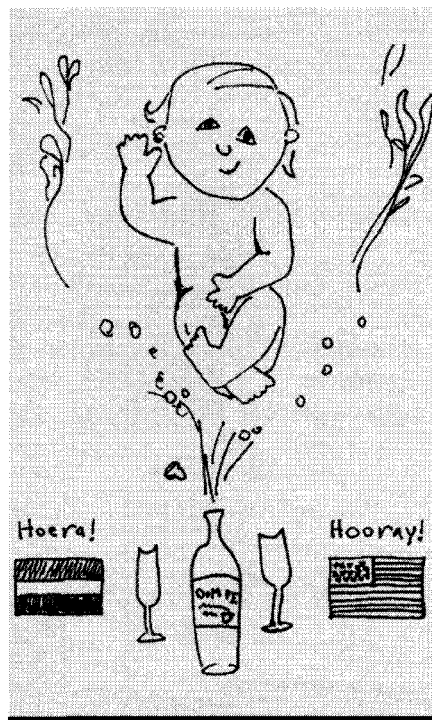
My wife, who is a physical therapist, is still on the job at this late stage of her pregnancy. She finds my airy reflections about the earthy business at hand to be somewhat fanciful. And I suppose there is something comical, if not mildly contradictory, in the disposition of one who would spend four years of his life writing

a dissertation in the field of practical theology.

But finally, I love the revelatory promise of a belief system grounded in the Word made flesh. I love that our ideas and our experiences, our minds and our bodies, go together—and that the Spirit finds realization in the flesh.

From a Catholic perspective, conception is a crossing over to *incarnation*—the Spirit enlivening the body—and each of us needs to find a way of "bringing to term" this love dwelling within us. Parenthood is only one way of embodying love, but it is a symbol of what all of us are called to do—imagine, create, raise up, provide for, teach, pray, persist, let go. As I suggest with this list, our incarnational responsibility is the work ("the labor") of a lifetime. Persons are not fully realized in the womb, or at birth, or even upon reaching adulthood. Full incarnation is really the coming to a sanctity each of us is called to, a condition in which love lives in the whole of our flesh.

In theory, I have all this down. But living out these conceptions is more challenging. During the school year, I direct a parish catechetical program for children. Each week I send home a parent letter with information and a "helpful" reflection. I anticipate writing, after our child is born, a letter titled "I Have Joined Your Ranks: Retractions Forthcoming." In the meantime, I take delight in our plan for our child to be born here at home, in the very room where I am "birthing" my dissertation. The baby, God willing, will be surrounded immediately by all my theology books. Now that is a serious coming together of words and flesh! □

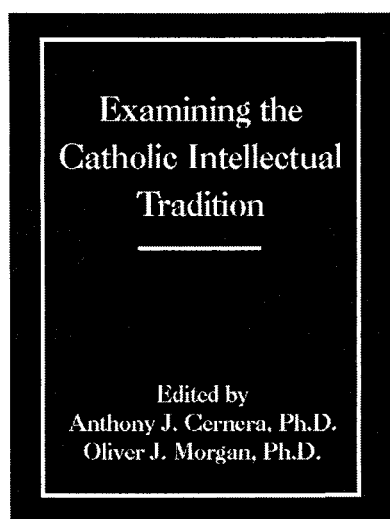


Timothy P. Schilling writes from Seattle, Washington. He and Janke de Groot are the proud parents of Annegien Helen Schilling, illustrated left, born on October 18.

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